

192. Constitutional reforms with special reference to the reconstitution of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.

MR. N. MADHAVAN NAIR (*Member, Trivandrum taluk, Group II*) said that the most noteworthy feature of the political reforms initiated during the illustrious reign of His Highness the late Maharaja was the promulgation of the Legislative Council Regulation II of 1097. The new Council as constituted under the Regulation was the embodiment of the largest measure of constitutional reform inaugurated by any Indian State.

But in spite of the very progressive nature of the Regulation, it imposed several restrictions on the rights of the Council. The number of reserved subjects under Section 11 was unnecessarily large. By virtue of this Section, subjects of supreme importance like the development of harbours, extension of railways, and reform of the currency were removed from the scope of the Council. The Section should be made more liberal and probably the only subjects that should be reserved should be matters relating to the Ruling Family and treaties with the Paramount Power. The list of demands not votable by the Council in the discussion of the Budget should also be reduced. Particularly, the salaries and allowances of all officers should be made votable by the Council. The right of asking supplementary questions should be given to all members and not merely to the person who put the original question. The Council should be given the right of electing the president from among the elected members, and the president should have only a casting vote. The number of members elected by the general constituencies should be raised so as to give them a clear majority in the Council.

So far as the Assembly was concerned, it should be reconstituted on a statutory basis with a broader franchise. The Assembly should be given the power of asking questions and moving resolutions. It should have control of the finances and all measures connected with taxation should receive its assent before they were accepted by Government. It should have the power of general discussion of the annual Budget and the legislative programme of every year should be placed before it for its approval. It should have the power to discuss the Dewan's address and vote upon it.

The establishment of an Executive Council was another measure that was absolutely necessary. The age of one-man rule had long since passed away. What was now wanted was a responsible body of ministers. They should be responsible to the Legislative Council and the Popular Assembly. Each of the ministers should be in charge of a separate portfolio. They should hold office only so long as they had the confidence of the Council as well as the Assembly.

The problem of evolving a perfect scheme of responsible government was indeed a hard one. It could best be done through a mixed committee of officials and non-officials.

193. Reform of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.

MR. M. N. PARAMESVARAN PILLAI (*Member, Municipal Council, Trivandrum*) said that the Assembly, as it was originally constituted, was intended to be a very useful body. It was designed to give the people an opportunity of expressing their wants and wishes direct to Government. It was also to enable them to represent to Government their views on the various administrative measures adopted by the Government from time to time. No subjects were at that time excluded from the purview of the Assembly. The qualifications for membership in the Assembly were of the simplest kind. The Assembly had also the power of asking questions. But all these were changed subsequently. All kinds of revised rules were introduced and the rights and privileges of the house were curtailed.

In spite of these retrograde measures the Assembly continued to do very useful work. The abolition of taxation in kind, the expansion of the powers of the Legislative Council, the advancement of social legislation, the inauguration of several educational reforms, the extension of railways, the Revenue-Devaswom separation, these were but a few of the most beneficial measures which could be traced to the direct influence of the Assembly. No less a person than the late Sir P. Rajagopalachari had paid a very glowing tribute to the Assembly in the following terms :